

Message Text

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ACTION L-01

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 ARA-06 NSC-05 NSCE-00 EB-03 EUR-08

INR-05 CIAE-00 SCA-01 SAB-01 SSO-00 INRE-00 /045 W

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O R 121643Z JUL 75

FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 4481

INFO PANCANAL NIACT IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 4156

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, PGOV, JM, PN, CS

SUBJECT: VESCO SEIZURE OF VESSEL

REF: STATE 164144

1. EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED INFORMATION WHICH MIGHT IMPLICATE ONE OR MORE OFFICERS OF GUARDIA NACIONAL (GN) AND OTHER PANAMANIAN IN ASSISTING VESCO IN HIS RECOVERY OF VESSEL DESCRIBED REFTEL.

2. THIS INFORMATION WAS OBTAINED BY EMBASSY LOCAL EMPLOYEE FROM RODRIGO RIERA, WHO CLAIMED HE WAS PARTICIPANT IN RECOVERY EFFORT. RIERA TRAVELED TO SAN JOSE IN LATE JUNE AT REQUEST OF A HIGH LEVEL GN OFFICER TO DISCUSS WITH ROBERT VESCO PLANS FOR RECOVERY OF LATTER'S YACHT. HE WAS GIVEN DOCUMENTS WHICH SUPPOSEDLY SHOWED OWNER OF VESSEL TO BE INTERCOMSA, SA. HE WAS INSTRUCTED TO VISIT MIAMI, ACCOMPANIED BY AN ATTORNEY AND A SHIP'S PILOT AND, WITH POSSIBLE ASSISTANCE OF PANAMA CONSUL THERE, TO ATTEMPT TO PROVE VESSEL WAS NOT PROPERTY OF VESCO. IF SUCCESSFUL, HE WAS TO HAVE THE VESSEL DEPART IMMEDIATELY.

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3. UPON RIERA'S RETURN TO PANAMA FROM SAN JOSE,

HE APPLIED FOR AN NIV AT THIS EMBASSY. AT TIME OF APPLICATION, RIERA PROVIDED EMBASSY A RECENTLY PREPARED DOCUMENT ATTESTING TO TRANSFER OF VESSEL'S OWNERSHIP FROM INTERCOMSA TO KUMAR NAVIGATION & INVESTMENT COMPANY, SA. A DECISION ON HIS APPLICATION WAS DELAYED PENDING INVESTIGATION OF RIERA'S POLITICAL ACTIVITIES AND REASONS FOR HIS BEING REFUSED ENTRY INTO THE US BY INS ON OCTOBER 19, 1974, WHEN IT WAS LEARNED THAT HE WAS TRANSPORTING COMMUNIST PARTY PROPAGANDA.

4. COMMENT: ALLEGED INVOLVEMENT OF GN OFFICER(S) IN THIS CONSPIRACY COMPLICATES PROSPECTS FOR RECOVERY OF VESSEL SHOULD IT ARRIVE PANAMA OR CANAL ZONE. A WORKING LEVEL APPROACH TO GOP COULD RESULT IN RADIO MESSAGE TO VESSEL DIVERTING IT AWAY FROM PANAMA OR CANAL--IF IN FACT IT PLANNED STOP HERE. A HIGH LEVEL APPROACH TO GOP COULD AVERT SUCH A LEAK AND MIGHT ENHANCE PROSPECTS OF RECOVERY.

5. EMBASSY FILES HOLD MUCH INFORMATION RE CAPTAIN JUAN B. RUFFO, WHO HAS LONG HISTORY OF ALLEGED SMUGGLING, GUN-RUNNING (FOR AND AGAINST GOVERNMENT OF PANAMA), AS WELL AS ANTI-US PROPAGANDA ACTIVITY. FILE DATES BACK TO 1965. CONSULAR FILE BEING POUCHED AS REQUESTED.
JORDEN

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